

# Transitions: Follow the Money, Follow the Blood

A Sermon Delivered at the  
Unitarian Universalist Church of Ellsworth on February 9, 2014  
by Church Historian Dr. Wayne H. Smith

Today, I'd like to talk a little about the history of our church. Specifically, I'd like to focus on how we got started, what some of the roadblocks were, and how we finally got to where we are now. So, let's start at the very beginning (a very good place to start!).

The first real pastor to serve the Ellsworth area was Rev. Peter Nourse. Rev. Nourse was born in Bolton, Massachusetts in 1774 and graduated from Harvard College in 1802. Although he made occasional visits to the Ellsworth area during the summers, he didn't actually move to this area until 1810. Ellsworth historian Herb Silsby, in his History of the Congregational Church in Ellsworth, notes that Nourse arrived in 1810 with every intention of establishing a church, which he eventually did in 1812. He was hired by the selectmen of Ellsworth to work one-quarter time as a preacher, and three-quarter time as the superintendent of Ellsworth's "common" or elementary schools.

Although Nourse wasn't exactly a Unitarian, he was indeed of the liberal persuasion. Another Ellsworth minister described him as "a man of liberal mind and genuine Christian feelings and not regarded by the Orthodox clergy as perfectly sound in the faith." Others said that he "preached the love of God rather than the terrors of the law". It is interesting to note that the pulpit Bible that he used at the Congo church had been given to him by Rev. William Ellery Channing, the leader of the Unitarian movement. They had been classmates at Harvard.

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Nourse's Unitarian, or at least "liberal", leanings eventually created some controversy among his parishioners. By the mid 1820s the "Unitarian Question" which had become rampant in the Congregational churches of Massachusetts had begun spilling into Maine. Membership at his church had fallen from 41 in 1828 down to 36 in 1835, and eventually Nourse made the decision to resign from his ministry in October of 1835, after a ministry of 23 years.

Those of his congregation who were of the Unitarian persuasion didn't want to lose touch with Nourse's type of liberal preaching, and as early as May 19 of 1835 a group of them issued a "Public Call for a Meeting", saying: "Those persons in favor of forming a Unitarian Society and taking measures for the support of liberal

preaching in this town are requested to meet for that purpose at the Masonic Hall tomorrow evening at seven o'clock."

At the meeting held the very next day and chaired by David Dyer, the participants, all men, voted "to form ourselves into a society to be called the Unitarian Society of Ellsworth."

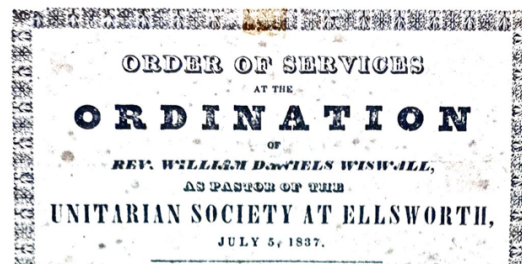
Perhaps more importantly, each of the Subscribers was encouraged to make a financial offering to assist in getting the organization off the ground. A total of \$595 was collected that evening, which in 2014 dollars would be worth about \$16,000. In true Unitarian form, a committee was appointed to find a preacher and locate a place for public meetings. This "Prudential Committee" was given discretionary power to manage the affairs of the Society, and within two months a Mr. Samuel Adams Devens arrived in Ellsworth and began serving as a "public teacher" on Sunday, August 23, 1835. The committee also arranged with the selectmen to use the Town House for the meetings of the Society, and Sunday services began on Sept. 6, 1835. After a six-week trial, the committee met at the office of **Charles Jarvis** [please remember this name] and decided to invite Mr. Devens to continue preaching with the Society for a total of nine months, at a salary of \$600 per year.

Well, it appears that Mr. Devens didn't score too many points with the congregation, and eight months later, once they had the opportunity to hear from a different preacher, Rev. William Daniels Wiswall who was then a supply minister working on occasion in Castine, the committee decided not to rehire Devens, but rather to extend a tentative invitation to Rev. Wiswall. Wiswall began in May of 1836 and by July the committee decided to ask Wiswall to settle over the Society. For some reason, they delayed action for another eight months, finally sending him the letter of invitation in March of 1837.

While they were waiting for Wiswall's response (Wiswall had by this time gone on a vacation down to Boston), the committee busied itself by naming the Society "The Unitarian Society of Ellsworth". (Didn't they already have that name??) Oh, well...

Finally, in May of 1837, Wiswall finally decided to accept the call to settle over the Society, and was ordained on July 5. He apparently stayed for two years, but apparently he wasn't very successful at his work. The reason for this is unclear, but in his

book *American Heretic: Theodore Parker and Transcendentalism*, Dean Grodzins describes how the well-known Unitarian theologian Theodore Parker later hired Wiswall in January 1846 to fill the pulpit at his church in Boston. Grodzins described Wiswall as "another little-known clergyman who had been without a



settlement for years” and notes that “for some reason [he] declined to deliver a sermon.” Parker, in his sermon record book, angrily noted: “No preaching. *Wiswall* was present!” Whatever the details were in Ellsworth, the facts stand for themselves. The Society was disbanded in 1839 and there was no church home for those of the Unitarian persuasion for twenty-six years, from 1839-1865.

So, what happened? And who was responsible for reestablishing the church so many years later? Was it a whole new batch of free thinkers who got together to reinvent the Unitarian wheel? Or were there interesting little threads connecting the early church to the eventual reestablishment? This was a question that had always bugged me as I looked at the historical records available in our archives. I figured that there had to be a connection, because we did have in our archives records from the church going back to 1835, so someone must have passed them down to the present, but who? The church records weren’t clear, so I finally sat down on January 25 and started to delve into the problem.

The results of my research could be summed up in two admonitions: “Follow the money” and “Follow the blood”.

Everyone always says, if you want to try and figure out something, you should “follow the money”. So I went back to the original subscribers list, recording the donations made to the Society on Wednesday evening, May 20, 1835. The meeting was chaired by one David Dyer, who also, alongside the Jarvises, made the largest donations to the cause, \$100 each, which in 2014 dollars would be about \$2,690. So who was David Dyer? This is where genealogy comes in handy, and it was helpful that I had a subscription to Ancestry.com.

### **Top Donors from the Original Subscribers’ List of Participants at the Meeting on May 20, 1835**

|                  |       |
|------------------|-------|
| David Dyer       | \$100 |
| Seth Tisdale     | \$50  |
| Joseph A. Wood   | \$25  |
| James Whiting    | \$25  |
| Robert Long      | \$25  |
| William Bennett  | \$25  |
| Jarvis’          | \$100 |
| Charles Lowell   | \$10  |
| William H. Black | \$20  |
| Seth Padelford   | \$10  |
| John D. Gilmore  | \$10  |
| Henry Hubbard    | \$10  |
| Newal Adams      | \$20  |

David was the son of a Capt. Elisha Dyer and his wife Sarah Perkins. Capt. Dyer died in St. Lucia in 1818 when David was 12, so he was raised by a single mother from that age on. The Aha! moment came when I found his marriage record.

On Mar. 12, 1829 in Ellsworth he married one Elisabeth B. Black, second daughter of Colonel John Nixon Black, an Englishman hired by Sir Francis Baring to manage his land holdings in Maine, and who saw Maine’s future in its forests and in

the lumbering industry. Colonel Black became extremely wealthy in his endeavors and the home he built on the Surry Road in Ellsworth in the 1820s is now among the most historic homes along the coast of Maine.



So, what of the Jarvises? They were the other \$100 donors to the Society at the meeting in 1835. It's interesting to note that no particular first name was attached to their donation. Who were they?

Well, Leonard Jarvis had been born in Boston in 1742 and eventually became one of the largest landowners in Maine. He had a total of ten children, and lived in Ellsworth and Surry. Herb Silsby describes them as “one of the most distinguished families in eastern Maine.”

Herb Silsby also notes that there was a considerable amount of enmity between the Jarvises and Colonel Black. The Jarvises were not only business rivals of Col. Black, but also political rivals: the Jarvises were Democrats, and Col. Black was a Whig. Their differences extended to the famous battle about the boundary line between Ellsworth and Surry. The Jarvises wanted the boundary line to be the Union River, and Col. Black wanted to keep his property within the city limits of Ellsworth. The boundary line actually went back and forth for quite a while, but in the end, Col. Black won out. If he hadn't, we'd be sitting in Surry right now. Put bluntly, the Blacks and the Jarvises hated each other.

Well, as sometimes happens, love intervened. Col. Black's oldest daughter, Mary Ann Black, when a young girl of 17, happened to meet one of Leonard Jarvis's sons, Charles, who was fifteen years her senior, but what difference did that make? They fell in love anyway, but getting permission from her father to marry the son of his enemy might be a challenge. But being, as Silsby said, “bold, assertive, and articulate”, Mary Ann Black wrote a long letter to her father:

My dear Father,

I cannot let another day pass without addressing you on a subject which employs all my thoughts, and on which my future happiness or misery depends; though too sensible of your feelings and opinion, still I cannot but cherish the hope, dear Father, that your

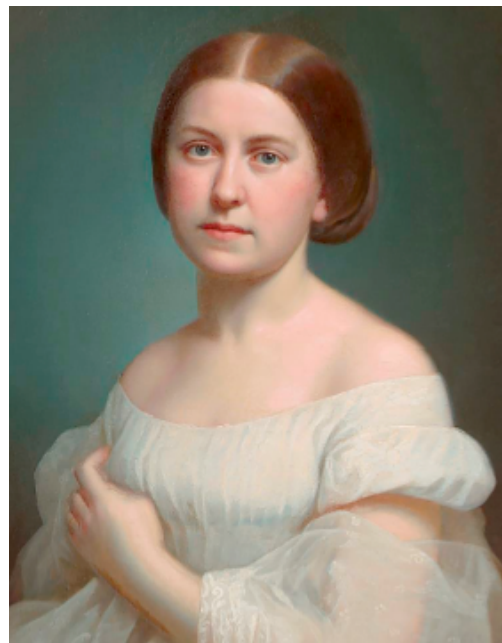
objections to my connection with Mr. Jarvis are not insurmountable, and that you will not oppose our union – painful and heart-rending as it would be, to be renounced by a dear and beloved parent, still I cannot give him up; for it has been an attachment of years, not days... Should I be connected with Mr. Jarvis, I shall always love you as I have always done; and forever be grateful for the many and very great kindnesses you have bestowed upon me – do not, I beg of you, think because I love another, I must forsake my Father; No! I should feel in duty bound to respect and love a parent; but you, I should love whether I was bound by duty or not; and ungrateful indeed I must be not to love you...

As to renouncing Mr. Jarvis I cannot think of it, and Oh! I most sincerely beg of you not to ask it....do, dear Father, think of him as favourably as possible, and by so doing you will greatly add to my happiness of her who dearly loves you.

Her father eventually relented, and the two families were united on Christmas Day, 1820 in the newly formed State of Maine. They were to have eleven children.



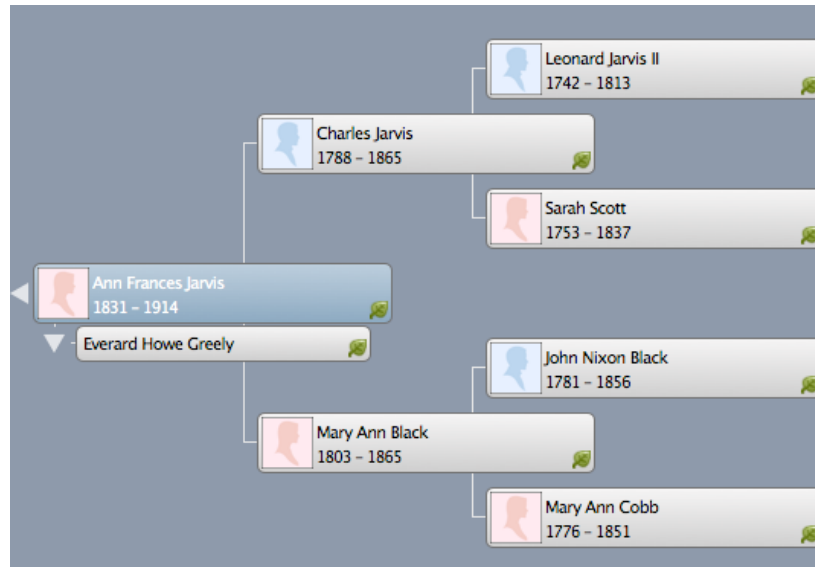
FROM A HISTORY OF ELLSWORTH, MAINE



So why, you might ask, am I spending so much time talking about the Blacks and the Jarvises? Remember: we also need to follow the blood. Well, one of the children of this union was to play a major role in reestablishing the Unitarian church in Ellsworth in 1865.

Ann Frances Carr Jarvis was born on Oct. 15, 1831 in Ellsworth. She went to the common schools of Ellsworth, but was largely self-educated. At the age of 20 she bought Thomas White's dry goods store and became Ellsworth's pioneer





businesswoman. Just like her mother, she was “bold, assertive, and articulate”. At the age of 21, she married Everard H. Greely who was known for his work with horses.

Around the time of their marriage, in the early 1850s, Ellsworth was amidst a lot of controversy around women’s issues, slavery, and the reading of the Bible in the public schools. And, as Herb Silsby puts it, “From this political and social cauldron emerged a remarkable and talented woman who took charge of the women’s rights movement in Hancock County. She brought to Ellsworth several nationally known lecturers.”

Ann Greely was an ardent abolitionist and Ellsworth’s first suffragist, and had read about the first organizational meeting for women’s suffrage, held in July of 1848 in Seneca Falls, New York, and with the help of her co-worker Caroline Hill of Gouldsboro, she was able to get a number of well-known women’s rights supporters



to come to Ellsworth. In 1857, she helped organize the Women’s Rights Ball and fireworks display; she organized a circulating library which eventually became the Ellsworth Public Library; she carried on debates in the Ellsworth newspaper promoting women’s rights; she helped organize the Ladies Benevolent Society “to assist the suffering poor and needy”; and invited, among others, Susan B. Anthony to come to Ellsworth and present a lecture on women’s rights on Mar. 5, 1857 at Whiting’s Hall. Ms. Anthony’s speech was well-received. One person wrote: “It was fruitful in ideas and suggestions, and, we doubt not, many a woman – and man, too, for that matter – went home that night with germs of more active thought in their heads than had gathered there for 12 months before.”

The momentum for women's rights slowed down with the beginning of the Civil War, but as the Civil War came to a close, Ann Greely was at it again. Although there was no longer a Unitarian Church in Ellsworth, there was still a strong sentiment for the Unitarian faith among its inhabitants. In 1865, Ann and two friends, Ms. Fanny Otis, her aunt's sister, and Ms. Kate Dyer (where have we seen that name before?), decided to do something about it. The three women got together and addressed a letter to the Rev. Dr. Charles C. Everett, the Unitarian clergyman in Bangor, asking for his help in reestablishing the church in Ellsworth.

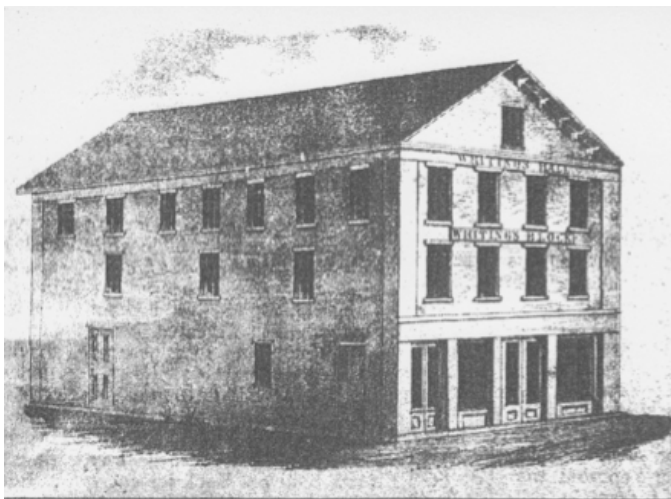
**INDEPENDENT LECTURE !**

**MISS SUSAN B. ANTHONY,** of Rochester, N. Y., will lecture at **WHITING'S HALL, Ellsworth.** on **THURSDAY, EVENING, MARCH 5th.**

**SUBJECT:**  
**RIGHTS AND POSITION OF WOMAN**

Doors open at 6 3-4 o'clock. Lecture to commence at 7 1-2. Tickets 25 cents, or three for 50 cents, to be had at the store of Ann F. Greely and at the door.

Rev. Everett recommended that Rev. William H. Savary, of Groveland, Massachusetts, come to Ellsworth to "test out the theological waters for himself". He conducted two services at a location on Pine St., and later returned to Ellsworth in the fall of 1865 with the intention of organizing a new church. Services were still held at the Pine St. location until the spring of 1866, and then they were moved to Whiting's Hall on Main St., where Susan B. Anthony had spoken.



Whiting's Hall, Ellsworth, 1850

By 1866, plans were afoot to erect a new meeting house, and the organizing committee purchased land at the corner of Main, High, and Oak Streets from Samuel K. Whiting, whose father had originally built a tavern on that property. They then hired S. S. Woodcock, a Boston architect, to design the new church. They wanted it to be “new Gothic” or “Victorian”, a style now known as “wooden Gothic”. They then hired I. and O. W. Kent of Ellsworth to build the building, which consisted of an “audience room” with 60 pews that could seat 300 people, and added to that a vestry room and a gallery that together could hold an additional 200 people. This building was dedicated on Aug. 28, 1867. And so for the first time in thirty years, the Unitarians had a home!



Ever the activist, Ms. Greely kept up the struggle for women’s rights in Ellsworth. In the 1870s, Ann Greely and three of her sisters, Sarah Jarvis, Caroline Jarvis, and Elisabeth Jarvis, were among the eight signers of a protest letter sent to the assessors of the city of Ellsworth which went as follows:

*“We the undersigned residents of the city of Ellsworth, believing in the declaration of our forefathers that “governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed”, and that “taxation without representation is tyranny,” beg leave to protest against being taxed for support of laws that we have no voice in making. By taxing us you class us with aliens and minors, the only males who are taxed and not allowed to vote; you make us the political inferiors of the most ignorant foreigners, negroes, and men who have not intellect enough to learn to write their names, or to read the vote given them. Our property is at the disposal of men who have not the ability to accumulate a dollar’s worth and who pay only a poll tax. We therefore protest against being taxed until we are allowed the rights of citizens.”*

And in 1873, in her capacity as an officer and member of the Advisory Committee to the National Woman Suffrage Association, Ann Greely signed a letter to Congress:

*To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives in Congress Assembled:*

*We the undersigned citizens of the United States, but deprived of some of the privileges and immunities of citizens, among which is the right to vote, beg leave to submit the following Resolution:*

*Resolved: That we the officers and members of the National Woman Suffrage Association, in Convention*





*assembled, Respectfully ask Congress to enact appropriate legislation during its present session to protect women citizens in the several States of this Union, in their right to vote.*

Ann Greely died in 1914, six years before the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment was ratified in 1920, giving women the right to vote. The *Ellsworth American* commented that her death “marks the passing of one of Ellsworth’s best-known and best-loved women, and during many years of her active life, the city’s most prominent woman.”

(To be continued.)